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# Exploring Personal Responses to Reading: A WWII Book Study [4th grade]

Jennifer Wray

Trinity University, [Jennifer.Wray@trinity.edu](mailto:Jennifer.Wray@trinity.edu)

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# UNDERSTANDING BY DESIGN

## Unit Cover Page

Unit Title: Exploring Personal Responses to Reading: A WWII Book Study

Grade Level: 4

Subject/Topic Area(s): Reading

Designed By: Jennifer Wray

Time Frame: 5 weeks

School District: Aurora Public Schools

School: Jewell Elementary

School Address and Phone: 14601 E. Jewell Ave.  
Aurora, CO 80012  
303-751-8862

### **Brief Summary of Unit** (Including curricular context and unit goals):

This unit arose out of students reading passively and not responding to their texts. In order to inspire a response in students, these picture books set in the WWII era are particularly powerful and typically evoke passionate responses. The unit focuses on understanding different perspectives in history and an author's purpose for writing. The other main focus is teaching students how to have a personal response to a text. Authors of these books specifically wrote their stories to learn from the past and create peace for the future. Therefore, the performance task at the end invites the students to use the books as inspiration for their own project that could benefit their own world. It is an avenue for students to respond to text in a positive way as well as empowering them as children with powerful ideas that can make a difference!



**Unit: Exploring Personal Responses to Reading: A WWII Book Study**

**Grade: 4<sup>th</sup> Grade Reading**

**Stage 1: Desired Results**

**Established Goals (Standards)**

*Colorado Model Content Standards or Scope & Sequence*

**(1d) Draw inferences using contextual clues (especially in terms of characters)**

**(4a) Determines author's purpose**

**(4e) Recognize the author's point of view**

**(6d) Read and respond to literature as a way to explore the similarities and differences among stories and the ways in which those stories reflect the ethnic background of the author and the culture in which they were written**

-Makes critical judgments as part of personal response when establishing individual points of view

**Understandings**

*Students will understand that...*

- *Authors write from a specific perspective that influences their story and this understanding can help the reader comprehend the story on a deeper level.*
- *Good readers have a personal response to their reading and connect it to their own life.*
- *There is more than one way to look at an event in history.*

**Essential Questions**

- Why does it matter who tells the story?
- How does war affect people or things?
- How does reading a powerful book evoke a response in you?

**Knowledge**

*Students will know...*

- WWII affected people in different ways.
- Authors use their own experience and understandings to help them write.
- Illustrations can support the author's purpose.
- Vocabulary: perspective and point of view, WWII, Allies, Axis powers, Nazi, Judaism, bias, personal response

**Skills**

*Students will be able to...*

- Identify the perspective of an author.
- Tell why it is important to know the author's bias.
- Identify different perspectives of history.
- Infer a character's thoughts and feelings.
- Have a personal response to reading and understand how it affects their own life.
- Understand WWII and be able to apply deeper reading concepts
- Discuss and write about their ideas.

**Stage 2: Assessment Evidence**

### **Performance Task:**

Now that students have read and responded to several books they will be asked to write a proposal for how the class can act on the unit. The student will prepare a call to action and try to convince the rest of the class to join them. The format of the proposal is the student's decision; it could be a poster, song, letter, speech, piece of artwork or anything else they decide. After students present, the class will vote on the proposal they actually want to do. Then, complete the task as a class!

**Documents are provided at the end of the unit.**

### **Other evidence:**

*(quizzes, tests, academic prompts, self-assessments, etc.*

*note – these are usually included where appropriate in Stage 3 as well)*

*Students will often be given a “Exit Slip” which answers a question or give a response before they are allowed to leave the room on many days.*

*Periodically, students will be asked to write letters from a certain character's perspective to demonstrate understanding of point of view.*

## **Stage 3: Learning Activities**

*(Steps taken to get students to answer Stage 1 questions and complete performance task)*

*These lessons are designed to supplement a guided reading block structure. The mini lesson will typically take 20 minutes and then students will have an independent time to respond and read on their own followed by a short share time at the end. Teacher will pull groups during independent time and read texts on appropriate student levels to reinforce ideas and conversation.*

*Having multiple copies of the books (or making photocopies) available during independent time will support struggling readers and give them more access to the text. Pairing students to buddy read during independent time would be a good way to scaffold the learning for struggling readers.*

- **Lesson 1: Overview of WWII**

The teacher will need to learn what kind of background knowledge the students have about WWII. Do a word dump by putting words like holocaust, Hitler, concentration camp, Judaism, WWII and Allies on note cards and have students pair share what they know about these terms. Chart what they have and then supplement their background knowledge with an overview of the conflict. Pictures can be very powerful and supportive here. (See Powerpoint presentation) Explain this background knowledge will help them understand the upcoming unit in reading. Then introduce essential questions and discuss the performance task for the end of the unit.

*Exit slip: Students write 2 questions or things they do not understand about WWII and 2 things they want to know more about. They complete this during their independent reading time and then provide them the opportunity to share with a partner before the reading block is over.*

*To scaffold learning for English language learners or emergent readers, provide The Lily Cupboard to them during independent reading this day. This will allow learners to preview the*

text and read before receiving the information with the rest of the class.

- **Lesson 2:** Begin The Lily Cupboard *Final Question* “How can you be a hero?”

*Pre-assessment:* Before beginning the lesson have students answer 3 questions.

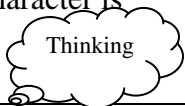
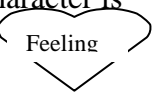
Who is affected by war?

How does a reader respond to stories?

What is perspective?

Give background information for The Lily Cupboard. Students will pair share to preview the book and discuss predictions. The first day the teacher will read the book and stop reading right before the soldiers leave and Miriam can get out of the cupboard. Begin to fill in a chart about how Miriam is feeling and what she is thinking. (To help readers understand her point of view)

Post this sentence structures to scaffold learning - “Miriam is thinking/feeling \_\_\_\_\_. I know this because \_\_\_\_\_.”

Character:	Miriam	Nello and his family	Miriam’s parents
The character is 			
The character is 			

Students pair share their reaction to the story and discuss Miriam’s feelings and thoughts. Teacher records on chart.

*Exit slip:* Finish the sentence “I predict the story will end by . . . “Share with a partner at the end.

- **Lesson 3:** Finish reading The Lily Cupboard

Review thoughts from previous day and complete the story having students think about how Nello and his family are feeling and what they are thinking. Be sure to periodically check in on understanding and fill in students’ gaps. Students should think-pair-share before charting. Then fill in the chart for Nello and his family. Good discussion questions to help students think about the characters are:

Why do you think Nello's family took Miriam into hiding in their home?

What chances were they taking?

Why were they willing to risk their lives?

*Exit slip:* Why do you think the author wrote this story? Share with a partner at the end.

- **Lesson 4: Perspective Letters**

Discuss the exit slips from previous day. Then re-read the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> pages where Miriam's parents explain what is going on. Then fill in the chart for Miriam's parents. Provide sentence structure for kids to visually see on the board- "If I were Miriam's parents I would think \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_." Students will use this framework to start their discussion with their partner about the characters.

Next discuss the rabbit. Guiding questions: Why do you think Nello gave her the rabbit? Why do you think the rabbit was important to Miriam? Miriam protects her rabbit, what other relationship is this similar to? (*How her parents are protecting her*)

*Assessment:* Today the students will write letters from one character to another in the story to demonstrate their learning about perspective. Students choose one character and put themselves in their shoes to write a letter to another character in the story. For example, a student could pretend to be Miriam's parents writing a letter to Nello's family expressing their gratitude as well as their current situation. Student needs to demonstrate their proficiency of thinking from another character's perspective.

- **Lesson 5: Heroes**

Review previous day's letters and read a few examples. Then introduce the idea of heroes in this book. Re-read the 1<sup>st</sup> page and emphasize the sentence "But even in these dark times there were many heroes."

Ask students to think about this sentence and what it means.

Then ask: Who are the heroes in this story? Why? (they can use the chart for support)

Now, think about your own life, have you ever needed a hero?

Who are the heroes in your life? Why?

How could you be a hero to someone else today?

*Have two big pieces of butcher paper with the last two questions written and allow students to record their answers. This can be used as a support for the performance task.*

Exit slip: Choice 1-Write a letter to your hero to say how they helped you and to thank them.

Choice 2-Write or illustrate a picture of things you could do to be a hero to someone else.

- **Lesson 6: Begin The Harmonica Final Question "How can you bring hope?"**

*Allow ELL and low readers the chance to preview the text before reading it with the whole group.*

*To increase interest, play Schubert music during independent reading so the kids can hear the music that was so beautiful to the family.*

Begin by looking at the cover and making predictions. Identify the main character and talk about what he might be going through in order to establish background knowledge. Name and notice the star, barbed wire, and especially the expression on all the people's faces. Then read the first page and pause. What can a reader infer about the character's parents after the first page? (*They*

*die because it says that he cannot remember their faces)*

Read through the page where the Nazi soldiers find them. Check in on understanding: What religion do you think the family is? What do you think the family is like? What do you think the soldiers will do? Or Why were the soldiers trying to find them?

*Activity:* Talk about the art work so far, what colors does the illustrator use? How do the pictures make you feel? Do they make you happy, sad, or angry? How do the illustrations support the story?

Now have crayons and paper available and show the students how you can shade over different materials (like textured paper, cheese cloth, or wire cloth) and have students draw a picture that reflects the family so far. The idea is that students will draw a happy family with light colors.

Later, students will draw another picture that uses dark colors to reflect the change in the story.

- **Lesson 7:** Finish The Harmonica

Review from previous day and then finish the story. Ask at the end, how did the little bring hope?

He says he despised himself though “I despised myself for every, note, every harmonica-breath . . . “ why did he feel like that?

On strips have: If I were the little boy, I would feel \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_. Would you have kept playing your harmonica? Why?

To share today have students line up in two lines facing each other and then share their strip with the person across from them. Then one line will scoot over to share with a different partner.

- **Lesson 8:** Illustrations

“We’ve discussed how illustrations can support a text, now I want to re-read you a page and I want you to pay special attention to how the illustration re-enforces the text.” Read and show picture (if you have access to a visualizer put it on the screen so all students can see an enlarged version) “I felt sick, black inside, playing music for the commandant, who wore ugliness and death upon his shoulders like epaulets. I felt sick, getting bread while others starved to death.”

What colors does the illustrator use? How do those make you feel?

What do you notice about the commandant? (*There is a skull above his shoulder*)

How does that support what we know about the commandant?

*Activity:* Get the crayons, paper, and textures back out and have students show how the boy feels now. They could draw him playing or working or whatever. Then the students will compare their first drawing to the second. Discuss the change (*his family is happy and together and then torn apart and miserable*) in the story and also how the illustrations support that.

- **Lesson 9:** Author’s Purpose focus



Could re-read the story if necessary or begin with the question “Why did the author write this?”  
(A chalk talk would be interesting here. Write the question on the board and then students silently get up to write their thoughts down if they like.)

Then read the note in the back that tells that the story was inspired by a true story “in the hope that they might bring about a better future.” Students can discuss in partners and then re-visit the chalk talk and see if any students want to add onto their ideas.

Teacher: “Understanding why the author wrote this can help us understand the book on a deeper level. This author had a very specific purpose for writing and was motivated by an important event in a life.”

- **Lesson 10:** How can you bring hope?

Teacher: “This is the last and most important day with this special book. We are going to talk about how we can connect it to our own lives today.”

Re-read only the parts about losing hope or dreams being swallowed. Then read the last 4 pages.

Teacher: “This is a really dark time and we’ve discussed how terrible the camps would have been, how does this boy rise above this and give hope?”

Have you ever felt hopeless?

Have you ever been around other people who felt hopeless?

At school, has there been a time when people felt sad or hopeless?

Now, what could you do about that?

Think about how the little boy inspired hope using what he knew, is there anything you could do to bring hope to others?

*Chart their responses because they can use these ideas for the final task.*

*Journal or Exit slip:* Choose one thing that you can do this week to inspire hope and write it down. Then DO IT!

- **Lesson 11:** Begin Sadako

Sadako is the first book that shows how the war affected people on the “other” side from the US. The teacher will need to provide a little background about the atomic bomb on Hiroshima. Look at the cover and talk about the cover. Discuss how the war affected everyone, not just the military, not just soldiers, and not just Jewish people. Tell them that even long after the bomb went off, it’s effects were still being felt.

Read until the part where just after Benji dies and something good happens to Sadako. Check for understanding about how Sadako got leukemia and also if they understand why Benji died.

Have students fill in the sentence structure “If I were Sadako I would feel \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_.” Then share out with the “Give One, Get One” strategy. The kids move around and high five a partner and share how they would feel and why, then they

move to the next person who doesn't have a partner.

- **Lesson 12:** Finish Sadako

Finish reading the story. Why do you think the author wrote this story? How is it different from the other 2 stories we have read? What perspective does this story show?

Could be done with partners on cards or as whole group:

In the first two books, who did we feel sorry for? (*Miriam, the little boy-all Jewish people*)

Did you feel bad for the Nazi countries when we read The Lily Cupboard or The Harmonica?

Why not? (*they were killing Jews and the "bad guys"*)

In this story, who do you feel for? (*Sadako who is Japanese*) Why?

*Journal or Exit Slip:* How come we can think about one event in history (WWII) differently?

- **Lesson 13:** Cranes

Re-visit ideas from previous day about seeing history differently.

Re-read sections about the cranes. Also where her class finishes making her cranes. Then discuss.

Why does Chizuko tell her about the cranes?

Why are they so important to Sadako?

Why do kids still make cranes today?

Why do we have monuments?

*Activity:* Students will make their own cranes to display in the school somewhere. Get their ideas on how to set it up like a monument. Do they want to have an original caption or stick with “

This is our cry . . . “?

Instructions for origami:

<http://monkey.org/~aidan/origami/crane/>

- **Lesson 14:** Community Connection (Could take 2 class periods)

Read the author biography and discuss why she wrote this book. Then talk about how they can have an impact on the world.

“Good readers take what they read and think about it longer, then they do something about it.”

There is a website where you can write letters to Sadako and have them posted online.

[http://www.pcf.city.hiroshima.jp/kids/KPSH\\_E/top\\_e.html](http://www.pcf.city.hiroshima.jp/kids/KPSH_E/top_e.html)

Browse this site about what kids are already doing, then talk about what your class can do. You could bring up a local children's hospital and discuss things you could do for the kids there.

(Raise money for flowers, books, or games for them; write letters for them, draw pictures to decorate rooms or whatever the students come up with) Then do it!

- **Lesson 15:** Read Faithful Elephants

Preview the story and the cover. Read the back cover about why Yukio Tsuchiya wrote the story. Tell students to pay careful attention to the story and to notice what it makes them feel. Say that good readers respond to what they are reading. This means they must be thinking and engaged in the text in order to have a thought about it.

Then read the entire book. At the end of the book have students go back to their seats to write about how they were feeling and what they were thinking. This is a powerful text and students often feel strongly for the animals and have something to say. They can write their thoughts, feelings or questions.

At the end of independent reading students will share what they were thinking and the teacher picks up their thoughts.

- **Lesson 16:** If I were the zoo keeper . . .

Read the thoughts from yesterday and discuss some of the questions or big ideas students had. Then read the book again to students. Then discuss the zoo keepers' decision. If they were the zoo keeper, what would they have done?

*Exit slip:* If I were the zoo keeper, I would have \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_.

- **Lesson 17:** Who does war affect? Different points of view.

Review students' thoughts from the previous day and discuss their different ideas.

Post the question "Who is affected by war?" on butcher paper. Then allow students to discuss in partners and then record their thoughts on the board.

Then have them think about bullies at school. Write "Who is affected by bullies at school?" and students discuss. Guide them to the idea that bullies not only hurt the victim but hurt themselves and others at school.

Then ask students what they think the story would have been like if an American soldier had written this story. How would it have been different?

Give as much guidance as needed to help them understand that the author's perspective is important because it usually helps explain the moral of the story.

*Exit slip:* Why does it matter who tells the story?

- **Lesson 18:** 4 Corners

Re-read the book if your students need more support or make copies so they can re-read during independent time.

Teacher: "We have discussed how good readers think about and respond to what they are reading. One way we do this is by thinking hard about issues the books bring up." "Today we

will play a game that makes you think about some important ideas after reading Faithful Elephants.”

Explain 4 corners: there are 4 signs in the room (Agree, Strongly Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree) and the teacher will read a statement and then the students will think about their answer and then go to the corner where they fell. After the question, the students discuss in their corner what they think and then one student shares with the class what they were thinking.

Statements:

Innocent victims of war are not remembered.

We should always obey the rules.

Animals should be in cages.

Animals should die for the protection of people.

There is more than one way to look at a war.

The author’s perspective is important.

Only Jewish people suffered during WWII.

*Journal:* Have students reflect on the 4 corners game. Did they enjoy thinking about these statements? What did it feel like to have to choose a corner and defend your thought?

*Optional Exit slip:* You could also have students come up with their own questions if they get into the game and continue to play it the next day.

- **Lesson 19:** How can you create peace at (your elementary school)?

Read the “To the readers” and discuss what he means by “The power of an individual is small, yet we believe in the strength of collective human energy.” Discuss the sentence and then have students in partners write the message in a different way. For example, a student could write “When everyone works together, big things can happen.” Have students write their personal sentences on strips to display in the room.

Then students can discuss “seeds of peace and war prevention will be sown” and what that means. Then brainstorm ways to sow peace at their own school. Ask and chart (or substitute a chalk talk) “How can we bring peace to Jewell (own elementary school)?”

*These ideas will support the performance task.*

- **Lesson 20:** Performance Task

Explain performance task and go through rubric. Brainstorm ideas together as a support before they do the project on their own.

- **Lesson 21:** Presentations

After students have had time to complete their projects, they will present to the class. Then the class will vote on their favorite idea and complete the task together!

## Resources

Picture books:

- The Lily Cupboard by Shulamith Levey Oppenheim
- Faithful Elephants by Yukio Tsuchiya
- The Harmonica by Tony Johnston
- Sadako by Eleanor Coerr and Ed Young

Butcher paper

Notecards

Chart paper

Comprehension Through Conversation by Maria Nichols

Other Excellent Resources:

- The Butterfly by Patricia Polacco
- Rose Blanche by Ian McEwan

# Classroom Proposal Performance Task

You have now read and responded to books set in the WWII era. You have looked at the author's purpose, explored different points of view and had a personal response to the text.

Now it's time to **DO SOMETHING!** You are invited to create a proposal to the class with an idea that these books have made you think about. (It could be a book drive, a stop bullying campaign, a food drive, an idea to write letters to people, making posters around the school-be creative!) This is a call to action and your creation (a speech, a poster, a letter, a song, a rap, a play, or something else you decide) must convince your classmates that your idea is the best and worth our class's time to do.

Reflect on all the books we've read and what they make you think and then put that thinking into action! Once the class has voted we will complete the proposal together!

How will you sow seeds  
of peace at Jewell?



# Classroom Proposal Performance Task Rubric

	1-BU	2-PP	3-P	4-A
Completion	I do not have a project.	My project is not complete.	My project is complete.	I put extra effort into my project and went beyond the assignment.
Persuasion	My project was not convincing.	My project was somewhat convincing.	My project was convincing and some of the class voted for it.	My project was very convincing and persuaded the class it was a good idea.
Workmanship	My idea is not presented and the audience cannot understand it.	Mistakes make my project difficult to understand and my idea is not very clear.	There are very few mistakes and my idea is presented.	My project is error free and my idea is clearly presented.
Presentation	I did not practice and it was hard to hear me. I did not share all my information.	I was a little difficult to understand but presented all my information. I practiced a little.	I spoke clearly and practiced before presenting.	I spoke clearly and was easy to understand. I practiced a lot before presenting.
Self Assessment	This is not my best work. I did not use my time very wisely and I did not do my best.	I used some of my time wisely. I tried but I could have done better if I used my time better.	I used most of my time wisely and did my best. I am proud of my work.	This is my best work. I used all my time wisely and I am proud of my accomplishment.